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MASTER OF MILITARY STUDIES

TITLE:

**PRESIDENT GEORGE WASHINGTON: A TIMELESS MODEL OF GREAT
LEADERSHIP.**

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF MILITARY STUDIES

AUTHOR:

LCDR MATTHEW SCOTT JONES, SC, USN

AY 10-11

Mentor and Oral Defense Committee Member: Dr. Pauletta Otis, Ph. D.

Approved: *Pauletta Otis*

Date: *29 April 2011*

Oral Defense Committee Member: Dr. Edward J. Erickson, Ph. D.

Approved: *Edward Erickson*

Date: *29 April 2011*

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Executive Summary

Title: President George Washington: A timeless model of great leadership.

Author: LCDR Matthew S. Jones, United States Navy

Thesis: George Washington's life provides key leadership lessons that continue to serve as a model for today's military leadership.

Discussion: The life of George Washington offers many examples of great leadership. This paper provides relevant definitions of leadership, discusses how they were illustrated by George Washington, and provides examples of instances where those leadership skills were most in evidence. The purpose is to support the contention that George Washington was a great leader and that his example remains relevant for current military leadership. By examining just a few key examples throughout different parts of his life, it is clear that Washington's character evidenced the leadership quality of "living with integrity, taking care of one's people, inspiring hope, and consistency." The first example is a look at Washington's life during the time he served as a vestryman and how he gained the respect of his community while serving the church. Next, is a look at Washington during his service as the Commander of the Continental Army and how he resolved the pay issues for the troops and how he supported his subordinates. Lastly, will be a look at Washington as this nation's first President and how the decisions he made led this nation to where it is today. This paper examines these three parts of President Washington's life and measures it against leadership definitions derived from three contemporary leadership theorists: Dr. Steven Covey, Dr. Sarah E. Eaton, and Dr. William A. Cohen. Each of these theorists have different tenets that they consider paramount to great leadership. Washington embodies each of these three theorists' tenets even though they are from three different vocational areas. Thus, this paper will illustrate that Washington was a great leader and is suitable for teaching in all of today's professional military educational institutions.

Conclusion: President George Washington is an exceptional example of how a great leader lives and operates on a daily basis. This lesson is arguably no more evident today than in any other time in history. The way Washington lived his life, though not without mistakes, is suitable for teaching to the officers in all the U.S. military service schools. As this paper has examined the life and decisions made by Washington through the lens of a few of today's leadership experts one can clearly see that Washington is and will continue to be a great example of leadership suitable for study across all generations.

Preface

George Washington is one of our founding fathers but why was he chosen as our first president? I am interested in Washington because I wanted to know how he became such a great leader and how could that benefit me as a military officer. Why did this nation choose this man to be our first president? Were the qualities that he possessed something that he learned or was he born with the tenets that made him such a great leader? My research illustrated to me that leadership is much more than what is contained in Webster's definition; it is more about being a servant. Washington lived his life very consistently and was a servant in every position. The example Washington set is something that I believe I need to emulate more in my life, both personally and professionally.

The journey of completing this paper has been riddled with emotions both high and low. I want to thank God for the perseverance and strength to finish. I would also like to thank my family for their support and faith in me for the same. They have had a tough year while I have been away each week and I really appreciate their sacrifice. Lastly, I would like to thank Dr. Pauletta Otis for her mentorship and help throughout the year. She has been instrumental in refining this process and keeping me on track and actually achieving this goal.

Introduction

George Washington's life provides key leadership lessons that continue to serve as a model for today's military leadership. Although President Washington is not always the first person that comes to mind when studying leadership, Washington's example should be at the top of every professional military and business person's list.

At the time of his election as the first President of the United States, George Washington was a proven leader as illustrated by his actions throughout the American Revolutionary War. Under his leadership, the fractious independent colonies were able to gain their independence. As the country's first President, he assumed the very top leadership position in the new United States' government. The question remains as to what those leadership skills were and how they were developed throughout his life. The answers range from: his childhood, family influences, personality, schooling and religion.

There are several parts President Washington's life that provide leadership lessons that remain valuable. This paper provides relevant definitions of leadership, discusses how they were illustrated by George Washington, and provide examples of instances where those leadership skills were most in evidence. The purpose is to support the contention that George Washington was a great leader and that his example remains relevant for current military leadership. This paper examines three parts of President Washington's life and measures it against leadership definitions derived from a three contemporary leadership theorists: Dr. Steven Covey, Dr. Sarah E. Eaton, and Dr. William A. Cohen.

Defining Leadership

There is no single definition for leadership. Instead, modern definitions of leadership include various types of concepts and eventually just list the key tenets possessed by great leaders of the past. Merriam Webster defines *leadership* (noun) as the capacity to lead; as the act or instance of leading.¹ Dictionary.com defines *lead* (as a verb) as “to go before or to show the way.”² If a leader goes before or shows the way, then what are the traits that make people want to follow? The definitions and lists generally converge at some point and provide common characteristics.

A plethora of experts, authors, seminars, and other tools are readily available via books, seminars, and the internet to define, develop, and improve upon the tenets were possessed by great leaders of the past. This thesis uses use three expert sources to identify key leadership tenets that are embodied in President Washington. These three individuals are Dr. Steven Covey, Dr. Sarah E. Eaton, and Dr. William A. Cohen. The goal in using these three people is to get a variety views of what makes a great leader. Below is a brief introduction to each of these individuals as well as what each believes as key tenets found in all great leaders.

Doctor Steven Covey is well known throughout the business industry for his leadership teachings, with more than twenty years of experience in motivational teaching, with six books published on the subject including: “The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People,” Dr. Covey stated on his website during an online interview in 2007 that “My definition of leadership is communicating to people their worth and potential so clearly that they are inspired to see it in themselves.”³ Dr. Covey goes on to say there is a formula for becoming such a leader that includes the following four imperatives: 1) Inspire to trust; 2) Clarify purpose; 3) Align systems; and finally, 4) unleash talent.⁴ It is easy to identify President Washington’s leadership skills in relation to each of Dr. Covey’s traits.

Doctor Sarah E. Eaton is a second source to determine key leadership traits. Dr. Eaton holds a doctorate of philosophy in Educational Leadership and has traveled throughout the world teaching and speaking on the same subject. While many military professionals may not immediately recognize her, Dr. Eaton's body of work is highly relevant for military leadership. She identified three critical elements to excellent leadership; set an example by living it, inspire others and give them hope, and empower others.⁵ While Dr. Eaton may not have had the military in mind when she identified these elements, they are similar to the leadership principles taught in the U.S. military's Professional Military Education institutions, such as The Lejeune Leadership Institute.⁶ By using these elements as described by Dr. Eaton to examine the history of President Washington's life, history will quickly illustrate how great an example to all leaders he truly was.

The final source for traits will come from William A. Cohen, Ph. D., Major General, USAFR, Ret. William A. Cohen authored several books and currently serves as a guest speaker on the subject of leadership. In Dr. Cohen's book *The New Art of the Leader*, he described eight universal laws of leadership through a combat model using many examples.⁷ A further explanation of the eight laws is found in his book *The Stuff of Heroes*.⁸ These laws, as described by Dr. Cohen, make up the foundation for all concepts and techniques in this book.⁹ These laws are: maintain absolute integrity, know your stuff; declare your expectations, show uncommon commitment, expect positive results, take care of your people, put duty before self, and get out in front.¹⁰ When comparing President Washington's character to the character traits listed by Dr. Cohen, it becomes increasingly evident that President Washington possessed the skill in leading not just an army, but a nation.

This paper will not use all the imperatives, elements and laws as described by each of the theorist listed above but combine them into the following five leadership tenets that appear to be common among all three theorists. The goal will then be to illustrate these five tenets throughout several periods of George Washington's life. The periods that will be used will come from three different periods in Washington's life, starting with his service as a vestryman, then while he served as the Commander and Chief of the Continental Army, and finally as the first President of the United States. Before looking at these three periods, it is important to look at what influenced George Washington's early life and who served as role models.

Background

The early years of Washington's life are known more through tradition, legend and myth.¹¹ One very important item to note is that Washington lost his father at the age of eleven and was raised by his mother with his two older half-brothers, Lawrence and Augustine Jr. who served as surrogate fathers.¹² This forced Washington at an early age to serve in a more mature role within his family. Washington's father and two half-brothers received their schooling from the Appleby School of Westmoreland in England.¹³ Washington's father planned to send him to this same school but these plans were scrapped upon his father's untimely death.¹⁴ The teachings of this school, as passed along by his father and half-brothers, had a great influence on young Washington. So much so that at the age of 16, George Washington copied the *One hundred and Ten Rules of Civility and Decent Behavior In Company and Conversation* into his notebook which was taught at the Appleby School.¹⁵ This writing was one of the earliest and quite possibly the most important influence in Washington's life.¹⁶ It is known that Washington's father, and his brother Lawrence, desired to have young Washington "bred" for an Officer in the

British Navy, and assumed that George's his mental acquisitions and exterior accomplishments would give him distinction in that profession.¹⁷

Without the formal education that his other male family members had received, Washington developed the very important skill of being an observant student of genteel behavior that served him well the rest of his life.¹⁸ As stated on the George Washington Foundation website:

Washington's experience on the frontier and in the army helped develop his confidence. These experiences fostered leadership skills that offset his lack of a classical education, enabling him to interact successfully with men of greater education and worldly experience.¹⁹

While many scholars disagree about whether Washington was a "real" Christian, none dispute the numerous religious influences that were found throughout his life. The local church, his family's belief in God, and the local school all had a great influence on the young Washington. He even served in the local church and was even partially responsible for planting a new church later in life. Another great example of the religious influence can be found at the beginning of his surveyor notebook where he inscribed "If you can't find it in the book of Ezekiel, look for it in Israel."²⁰

This religious influence was not just part of the setting but provided several role models. One of his primary role models was Augustine Washington, George's father, who held a position in the local church as a vestryman.²¹ It can be assumed that there was ample opportunity for young Washington to attend many church functions with his father. This allowed his father the opportunity to teach, by observance and lessons afterward, young Washington in the proper conduct of in business between the church and community. Washington's older half-brother Lawrence, served as a surrogate father after Augustine died, maintained the consistent school of thought taught by their father.

By today's standards, Washington would be considered to have been homeschooled with augmentation from the local church/school -- with a focus on applied mathematics, business law and Christianity.²² The mathematics, law, and religion were evidenced in Washington's service as a surveyor, leader in the Anglican Church, and as President.²³ Washington's Christian education and lack of upper level education proved to be instrumental in his dealings throughout his whole life.

Washington's leadership in the local church

Following in his father's footsteps, Colonel George Washington was elected into the Vestry of Truro Parish on October twenty fifth, 1762.²⁴ A vestryman was a lay-leader in the Anglican Church; the name is derived from the types of vests they wore.²⁵ Dr. Eaton states "In order to lead powerfully we must first demonstrate the attitudes and behaviors we expect and want from others."²⁶ Washington personifies this statement. He served not just at but in the local church for eleven years.²⁷

During this time Washington was responsible for many local civic duties such as best described by Thomas Jefferson in 1781.

The poor, unable to support themselves, are maintained by an assessment on the titheable persons in their parish. This assessment is levied and administered by twelve persons in each parish, called vestrymen, originally chosen by the house-keepers of the parish, but afterwards filling vacancies in their own body by their own choice. These are usually the most discreet farmers, so distributed through their parish that every part of it may be under the immediate eye of some one of them. They are well acquainted with the details and economy of private life, and they find sufficient inducements to execute their charge well, in their philanthropy, in the approbation of their neighbours, and the distinction which that gives them.²⁸

Washington considered this post very important and he demonstrated this belief when he stated:

"While we are zealously performing the duties of good Citizens and soldiers we certainly ought

not to be inattentive to the higher duties of Religion. To the distinguished Character of Patriot, it should be our highest Glory to add the more distinguished Character of Christian.”²⁹

Lillback states “It should be abundantly clear that not only did the church play an important part in Washington’s life but Washington played an important role in the church as well.”³⁰ Washington’s type of involvement is not a part time application much like that of Thomas Jefferson’s election to the vestry as a figurehead, but is marked with long and faithful service with many documented accomplishments.³¹

This time of service to the community through the local church proved instrumental in the years to come. It also helped mature the leadership skills that would serve the now Colonel Washington in his future posts as Commander of the Continental Army and ultimately the United States’ first President.

Washington’s Leadership as Commander of the Continental Army

Two of Washington’s greatest challenges were the establishment of the army and providing for the troops. Again, his leadership skills were in clear evidence. On June 15th George Washington was appointed “to command all the Continental forces”; on July 4, 1775, it was announced in general orders that the “troops of the United Provinces of North America” were taken over by Congress.³² Washington was quick to recognize the issue of enlisting and maintaining forces as stated by Bolton “The advantage of long over short terms of enlistment has the weight of all authorities familiar with raising, equipping, and drilling recruits.”³³

Washington himself said on this subject:

“The evils arising from short or even any limited enlistment of the troops are greater and more extensively hurtful than any person (not an eyewitness to them) can form any idea of. It takes you two or three months to bring new men in any tolerable degree acquainted with their duty; it takes a longer time to bring a people of the temper and genius of these into such a subordinate way of thinking as is necessary for a soldier. Before this is accomplished, the time approaches for their dismissal, and you are beginning to make interest with them for their continuance for another limited period; in the doing of which you are obliged to relax in your discipline, in order as it were to curry favor with them, by which means the latter part of your time is employed in undoing

what the first was accomplishing...Congress had better determine to give a bounty of 20, 30, or even 40 Dollars to every man who will enlist for the whole time."³⁴

So how did Washington deal with the obvious cash flow issues as well as build up his forces. It would take him almost eight years before finally coming up with a solution to solve the cash flow issue and building up the force.³⁵ They had endured changes in pay as well as disparity in the amounts that the states paid for most of the last six years.³⁶ Washington was quoted as saying:

"Six years they had spent in the field without any other shelter from the inclemency of the seasons than tents, or such houses as they could build for themselves without expense to the public. They had encountered hunger, cold, and nakedness. They had fought many battles and bled freely. They had lived without pay, and in consequence of it, officers as well as men had subsisted upon their rations. They had often, very often, been reduced to the necessity of eating salt pork, or beef, not for a day or a week only, but for months together, without vegetables or money to buy them."³⁷

During eight dark years the officers and men who served under Washington grew more and more to know that a great man led them.³⁸ There is no better compliment than that of one's enemy. The British historian, John Richard Green, with rare comprehension of his character, has said of him:

No nobler figure ever stood in the forefront of a nation's life. Washington was grave and courteous in address; his manners were simple and unpretending; his silence and the serene calmness of his temper spoke of a perfect self-mastery...It was only as the weary fight went on that the colonists discovered, however slowly and imperfectly, the greatness of their leader, his clear judgment, his heroic endurance, his silence under difficulties, his calmness in the hour of danger or defeat, the patience with which he waited, the quickness and hardness with which he struck, the lofty and serene sense of duty that never swerved from its task through resentment or jealousy, that never through war or peace felt the touch of a meaner ambition, that knew no aim save that of guarding the freedom of his fellow-countrymen, and no personal longing save that of returning to his own fireside when their freedom was secured. It was almost unconsciously that men learned to cling to Washington with a trust and faith such as few other men have won, and to regard him with a reverence which still hushes us in presence of his memory."³⁹

In 1783, Washington quelled a potential coup, the “Newburgh Conspiracy,” instigated by weary and unpaid officers who called for the army to force Congress to meet their demands. But listening to their justifiable complaints, Washington wrote a circular letter to the States calling for justice to the army from the governors later that year.⁴⁰ It is over these eight years of Revolution that Congress witnessed the true depth of leadership skills possessed by this nation’s founding father.

Washington had to contend with defeat while he was Commander of the Continental Army. How he dealt with discouragement and defeat and handled the men subordinate to him serves as a testament to his leadership and judgment of character.

In October 1776, the Continental Army was defeated in northern Manhattan, resulting in the loss of Fort Washington. At this time, it was the worst defeat experienced by the rebelling colonists during the course of the war.⁴¹ The officer in charge was Major General Nathanael Greene. Washington had tasked Greene with preparing a defense for both Fort Washington and Fort Lee which was located on the Jersey side of the river. Greene had earlier recommended to Washington not to hold Fort Washington since it was occupied by Tories anyway, and upon learning that the British had sailed three ships up the river, Washington recommended to Greene that Fort Washington indeed be abandoned⁴². On November thirteenth Greene maintained that the fort could be held. By November fifteenth, the British had massed thousands of troops around Fort Washington and demanded its surrender. Greene ended up losing 2,800 men. This pained both Washington and Greene greatly.⁴³ But even through this defeat Washington never lost confidence in Greene. It took Greene several weeks before recovering and proceeding on to greatness. This illustrates the confidence Greene had in Washington’s leadership ability.

In a report to Congress, Washington split the blame for the defeat at Fort Washington between himself and Greene.⁴⁴ Washington was willing to stand by Greene and trust that the qualities he saw in Greene would reveal themselves in time. In keeping with the leadership traits described by Dr. Covey, Washington trusted that Greene would learn from his mistakes. Washington also saw in Greene a great talent (Greene would later become one of Washington's greatest generals) and was willing to give his subordinate the opportunity to further develop. This type of trust and willingness to unleash a talent proved to be one of Washington's great traits as a leader. This very clearly illustrates that he was not prone to micromanagement but would let his subordinates act. George Brookhiser states "If a leader believes there is ability and solidarity in a man, he should be given the opportunity to show it. Good men are rarer than good days, and more valuable."⁴⁵ It appears that Washington was very aware of this leadership principle.

Washington's Leadership as President

Not all great generals make good political leaders of nations. George Washington was an exception. The United States, in its infancy, choose a leader that set the standard for all future presidents. Washington was a man who had many military followers, as well as a civilian congress that respected and admired him. This ultimately resulted in his election as the United States' first President.

Earlier in 1782, Washington was urged to become king, but refused because of his personal republican views. Washington planned to return to Mount Vernon upon his completion of a successful revolution. In late 1783, Washington indeed said farewell to his Continental Army and arrived home on Christmas Eve to stay for the first time in eight years.⁴⁶

Congress had other ideas for this great leader and his time at home was very short. The powers accorded the presidency by the Constitution “would not have been so great,” one of its framers recalled, if he and his colleagues had not “cast their eyes toward General Washington as president and shaped their ideas of the powers to be given to a president by their opinions of his virtue.”⁴⁷ King George III was quoted as saying “Washington would be the greatest man in the world” after being informed of Washington’s intentions for the period after the Revolution.⁴⁸ This statement could very well be one of the greatest compliments given to a man during the history of our nation.⁴⁹

One of the key abilities of President Washington was the ability to unify the policies of the new government.⁵⁰ Washington’s showed his leadership ability as President when he was able to unite the first two American Party systems, the Federalist Party and the Republican Party. Uniting the different faction was a challenge and Washington was not always successful. This was because two influential and powerful cabinet members, Thomas Jefferson and Alexander Hamilton, had differing opinions and strong wills.⁵¹

He managed the factions by ensuring that all correspondence was routed to the correct department then to back to the Office of the President for final signature.⁵² This correspondence policy served Washington’s administration well by ensuring the administration provided a united front to the public.⁵³

Washington is also credited with instituting cabinet meetings where he could engage all of his cabinet members on a regular basis and require them to lead the briefing on the subject of their choosing.⁵⁴

Washington’s philosophy on dealing with different views is best summarized by Washington himself: “To please everybody is impossible; were I to undertake it I should

probably please no body. If I know myself I have no partialities. I have from the beginning, and I will to the end pursue to the best of my judgment and abilities one steady line of conduct for the good of the great whole.”⁵⁵ Overcoming adversity by holding onto personal integrity was not something new to Washington.⁵⁶

Analysis of Washington’s Leadership

The life of George Washington offers many examples of great leadership. By taking just a few key examples throughout different parts of his life, it is clear that Washington’s character evidenced the leadership quality of “consistency.” Whether or not Washington “chopped down the cherry tree” is not of concern, but what is important is the belief that Washington was consistently true to his word.⁵⁷

This and many other great character traits are what this paper will analyze using the three contemporary leadership experts listed earlier: Dr. Steven Covey, Dr. Sarah E. Eaton, and Dr. William A. Cohen.

Each of the examples will be examined through the lens of these three experts and the traits in which they consider essential to great leadership. This should reveal the fact that Washington possessed these traits.

Stephen Covey lists the following four imperatives that form the basis for becoming a great leader: 1) Inspire to trust, 2) Clarify purpose, 3) Align systems and finally 4) unleash talent.⁵⁸ By first looking at Washington as a vestryman, it becomes evident of the trust that Washington’s community placed in him. The duties required by a vestryman in the mid 1700 as described by Jefferson above were all about aligning systems. While there may not have been the opportunity in this example to unleash talent, the fact that the community chose Washington

for such an important community post speaks volumes of the character he possessed in the eyes of his peers. This display of trust serves as a great example for what Dr. Covey has qualified as character traits of great leaders.

Using Washington's life as a vestryman and looking at it through the lens of Dr. Eaton illustrates a view from a different approach but reaches the same conclusion: Washington's life and activities exemplified great leadership. Dr. Eaton states the following: "set an example by living it, inspire others and give them hope and empower others."⁵⁹ Washington considered the post as vestryman to be a higher calling than being a soldier. While this may have been the norm for family business of the Washington clan, this position was a good example of the attention that Washington gave to the wellbeing of the community.

Dr. Cohen's view on leadership breaks down leadership traits into eight different laws: maintain absolute integrity, know your stuff, declare your expectations, show uncommon commitment, expect positive results, take care of your people, put duty before self, and finally get out in front.⁶⁰ Washington possessed many, if not all of these traits. It is readily apparent that Washington showed the level of commitment by his public service record. Washington also was very keen on taking care of his people and his community. Washington was a skilled practitioner in the Art of Leadership as he exemplified all of the characteristics listed by Dr. Cohen.

Washington's faith and self-sacrificing attitude are illustrated as fundamental elements of his character and are not just brought out by specific events.

The next example is Washington's service as Commander of the Continental Army for eight years. One of the major problems was payment for all the soldiers (officers and enlisted) that served under Washington. This was a very complex and difficult issue that did not have a

quick or easy fix. How he handled it, with persistence and integrity, illustrates Washington's true ability to prioritize different crises as well as accomplish a common goal for this nation over a long and difficult period. The issue of pay and how Washington solved it required great skill not only as a leader of an army but also as politician by bringing independent state governments together for a common solution. "Taking care of your people" is still taught throughout the halls of all military schools around the world.

By examining how Washington acted and ultimately how he solved this issue it becomes clear that he possessed all the leadership traits as defined by Dr. Covey. Washington addressed the Continental Congress many times regarding the issue of pay for his troops. Finally, at the end of the war Washington was able to convince Congress and the state governors of his plan and bring this issue to a close. During the eight year period that he commanded the Revolutionary Army, it is very evident that Washington inspired not just the army but also the nation to trust his judgment.

With regards to Dr. Covey's area of "clarity of purpose" it is clear that Washington addressed both the Continental Congress and the Continental Army as to his purpose during this time. The same can be said about aligning the systems involved. It is clear by this example that Washington exemplified this characteristic as identified by Dr. Covey.

Dr. Eaton's view of this same example is quite similar. She states that by living out how you want others to act is the best way to set the example.⁶¹ This leaves little doubt as to what is expected from Washington by anyone who was a witness to his actions. Washington's example during this eight year period illustrates his ability to set an example.

The best example of Dr. Eaton's second tenet of inspiring others and just how much inspiration Washington exuded can best be illustrated by the British historian, John Richard

Green.⁶² In Green's quote, he captures the true scope of how much Washington inspired more than just the Continental Army but the nation as well. This type of inspiration serves as a great example of what Dr. Eaton described in her article as the second key element in "Excellent Leadership." It is through this inspiration that Washington was able to generate the amount of hope desperately needed and that ultimately enabled this nation and its army to continue to fight and finally gain its independence from British rule.

The final element needed in Dr. Eaton's list of critical elements is to "empower others." Washington was able to finish strong and solve the pay issues that plagued the states but also was able to capitalize on his influence and empower congress to ultimately create a national army paid for by the Government.

The first requirement from Dr. Cohen is that the leader to be must maintain absolute integrity. Washington's integrity was apparent even at an early age. Dr. Cohen's next law is that of knowledge. Though this paper does not specifically address Washington's formal or information education, it can be assumed that his experience as a surveyor gave him as much if not more knowledge of the terrain in the Virginia area than most people during that time. In addition, the business of a Vestryman added to Washington's knowledge base prior to this period. While it was not mentioned specifically, the men serving under him in the Revolutionary Army as well as the electorate and later, the Congress illustrated a great respect for Washington's knowledge in all levels of business.

The third law listed by Dr. Cohen is "Declare Your Expectations."⁶³ Washington's was very clear in his expectations. He wanted the issue of troop recruitment and pay to be worked out so he could focus on the task at hand and defeat the British. The fourth law that Dr. Cohen describes is "Show Uncommon Commitment." There are probably few people in history that

would question the level of commitment Washington possessed during not only these eight years but his whole life. Dr. Cohen's fifth law is also clearly illustrated by Washington during this time by his actions: he never gave up. This indicates that he expected good things to come.

The last three laws as listed by Dr. Cohen are evidenced by Washington's actions throughout the eight year period of his military leadership. The fact that Washington worked for so many years both through the Continental Congress and the state governors at getting his soldiers pay issues resolved is a clear illustration of his belief in taking care of his people.⁶⁴

It is clear from the level of commitment from his troops as well as from the Continental Congress the amount of belief that was placed in Washington during these trying times. This fact alone illustrates the nation's willingness to follow as well as the trust it placed in Washington's abilities at all levels of government. The lesson of uncommon commitment from this example would serve both our military leaders as well as our political leaders well in today's world.

The next example that will be examined is also during Washington's tour as the Commander of the Continental Army. This example occurs during the defeat and loss of Fort Mifflin by General Nathanael Green. Washington placed his trust in Green and this trust suffered a setback. But unlike today's business trend of cutting this senior loose on the first mistake, Washington stood up for Green and took partial responsibility in front of the Continental Congress for the defeat and loss of this fort. This example illustrates Washington's ability to stand up for a subordinate in front of his superiors as well as other subordinates. Today's military officers could learn from Washington about the type of leadership commitment required to serve at the senior level.

In relationship to Covey's first and fourth leadership principles, "inspire to trust" and "unleash talent," Washington was clearly a great leader.⁶⁵ The example of Washington's relationship to Nathaniel Green is illustrative. Washington trusts Green's abilities. General Green aligned his vision with that of his commander. Green evidently felt confident in Washington's leadership and as Washington empowered Green, it allowed the junior commander to focus his talents on the future. By having a leader that was willing to listen to suggestions as well as allow you to act on your own therefore learning from your mistakes is greatly understated in today's military. This example falls very clearly into Dr. Covey's model of the "Four Imperatives of a Successful Leader."⁶⁶

The example of Washington's treatment of Nathaniel Green also illustrates one of Dr. Eaton's critical elements of excellent leadership. The first leadership element that Dr. Eaton describes is "living as an example for others to follow."⁶⁷ The level of commitment shown by Washington to the cause of revolution served as an example for Green.

Washington's actions were also inspiring to the rest of the Continental Army and to the new citizens of the United States. It is the third element of Dr. Eaton's leadership model, empowerment, that Washington's leadership is truly evident. Green's future successes serves as the greatest witness to the type of successful leadership Dr. Eaton was describing.⁶⁸ To have the faith and trust that someone behind you is one of the greatest motivators today's leaders possess but rarely use. Dr. Eaton could have been thinking of George Washington as the type of leader that would personify her idea of "Excellent Leadership."⁶⁹

Dr. Cohen's model for great leadership is a bit more complex than the previous two but provides a great model none the less. His "Eight Universal Laws of Leadership" provide a more specific model in which to follow.⁷⁰ It would have been acceptable for Washington to write off Green

for his mistake, especially with the loss of a battle and the loss of life. But it was not in Washington's character to do so. In Dr. Cohen's model for leadership, Washington should be ranked at the top. Washington had uncommon commitment as evidenced by the length at which he would go to take care of his people. The example of Washington's treatment of Greene also clearly illustrates Washington's ability to "know your stuff, declare your expectations, put duty before yourself or get out in front." Regardless of what Washington thought of Greene personally, he knew military leadership, put his responsibilities to his subordinates together with his own instincts, and was "in front" of other people's ideas of sacking Greene.

The leadership criteria provided by all three experts give incontrovertible evidence that Washington was a great leader. This example alone shows just how Washington was able to see and believe in the true character of this people and then stand by it through good times and bad.

(On a side note: How anyone assumes that there is a perfect and mistake free leader among us today is indicative of how unforgiving our society has become. For that reason alone this type of leadership is way too risky for today's military at the senior level. The world seems to have forgotten that it is out of failures that even greater leaders rise. Washington's ability to trust his subordinates and then stand by them when they fail, is a quality many consider lost in today's environment.)

The last example to be examined will be that period when Washington served as the country's first president. Perhaps the truest example of what the people thought of Washington at this time was that they asked him to serve as King.⁷¹ Although some would argue that this was the only type of government people really knew about, it is still a testament to George Washington's character and public leadership.

Dr. Covey's view of Washington at this time includes Washington's past. It is hard to qualify for Covey's first imperative without first looking at Washington's past record.⁷² This past record is what gets Washington into the position of President. The next two imperatives are where Washington really stands out in this example. Washington's ability to clarify what he sees as the right government and what is not was the key to his aligning the systems that make up our current government structure. His ability during this time to unite the whole of government into a united voice instead of to a voice from the different parties serves as further proof of his leadership ability under Covey's model. This unity is what sets up the key strength in our government by unleashing the talent of the Continental Congress to serve the people. Thus this example as a whole brilliantly illustrates the true depth of Washington's leadership abilities.

Dr. Eaton's model would also have to look into Washington's past before qualifying as a great example of leadership. Eaton's first element of "living it" is derived from all of Washington's past.⁷³ The excellent example set by Washington's past performance serves as the foundation that allows Washington to capitalize on the future successes as president and inspire a nation as well as give them hope. Thus it can be said that the key element in Dr. Eaton's model is the first because without this proof of living it how can inspiration let alone hope be attained. Finally, Washington's ability to focus on the "good of the great whole" and align congress into one voice coming from Washington himself further empowered this great nation.⁷⁴ This great example of selflessness as a whole would be considered by Eaton to be a further testament to the leadership skill that Washington possessed.

The "Eight Universal Laws of Leadership" as written by Dr. Cohen also reaches back into Washington's past in this examination.⁷⁵ It is here that the foundation for Cohen's "absolute integrity" is found.⁷⁶ Washington was very content to go home at the end of the war but his

“absolute integrity” had set him up for something he did not know how to do.⁷⁷ But, Washington was very sure of what the country did not need and that was a king.⁷⁸ During this time Washington was very clear about Cohen’s third law “declare your expectation” so much so that he eventually lost two of our future presidents from his cabinet.⁷⁹ This future illustrates the level of Washington’s commitment that Cohen describes as key in his fourth law.⁸⁰ Washington believed in the Continental Congress so much so that he was able to travel and get out in front of the people serves as a great illustration of the execution of Cohen’s fifth, sixth and eighth laws (expect positive results, take care of your people, and get out in front respectively).⁸¹ Through all of this and by serving two terms, Washington displayed his true commitment of putting duty before self thus meeting the seventh law of Dr. Cohen’s leadership model. The example as a whole is a great illustration to Washington’s leadership ability and the alignment with Dr. Cohen’s “Eight Universal Laws of Leadership.”⁸²

Conclusion

President George Washington possessed the key leadership traits that serve as a timeless model for today’s and tomorrow’s leaders. Such was his esteem that he was unanimously elected to high positions four times- as Commander of the Continental Army in 1775, as president of the convention that framed the Constitution in 1787, and served two terms as the country’s first president (1789 and 1792.)⁸³ Washington’s leadership characteristics serve as examples for leaders of today.

Washington believed in serving at any level as clearly demonstrated in his own life -- first by serving the local church, then his country through military service, then by holding public office. He also had a strong belief in God and that all things were for His glory.⁸⁴

Throughout his life, Washington was not self-serving in today's sense of the word. There is no greater example of this than those illustrated in this paper.

There are also many examples of this leadership quality throughout history but few ever reach the level that Washington illustrated throughout his lifetime.

President George Washington is an exceptional example of how a great leader lives and operates on a daily basis. This lesson is arguably no more evident today than in any other time in history. The way Washington lived his life, though not without mistakes, is suitable for teaching to the officers in all the U.S. military service schools. As this paper has examined the life and decisions made by Washington through the lens of a few of today's leadership experts one can clearly see that Washington is and will continue to be a great example of leadership and suitable for study across all generations.

Endnotes

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- ⁹ Cohen, *The New Art of the Leader*, page 23.
- ¹⁰ Cohen, *The New Art of the Leader*, page 23.
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- ²² Lillback, page 111.
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- ²⁶ Sarah E. Eaton, <http://drsaraheaton.wordpress.com/?s=3+keys+to+leadership>, (last accessed on January 12, 2011).
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- ³⁴ Washington to Reid, February 1, 1776, in his Writings (Ford), vol. 3, p. 400. For some suggestive remarks on short enlistments and an untrained militia during the wars subsequent to the Revolution, see Hazard Stevens's address, October 14, 1898, "Reform the militia system" (Boston, 1898).
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- ³⁷ From Washington's words, in his Writings (Ford), vol. 10, p. 204.
- ³⁸ Bolton, page 71.
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